HIS SOCIAL SIDE.

Henry Irving and His Midnight Dinners.

HOME OF THE BEEFSTEAK CLUB.

Rare Scenes Behind the Curtain of the Lyceum, When the Footlights are Extinguished.

LONDON, Dec. 1, 1890.—[Special correspondence of THE HERALD.]—Henry Irving gave a midnight dinner only a short time ago to a few friends, as he frequently does. I was there. A number of pleasant people were around the table, but the interest was not alone centered in the company, but in the surroundings. The women and men who sat around it would have been more than welcome in any company on the face of the earth. The story which this dinner tells is a singular one, because it brings out new phases of character, and presents Mr. Irving in the light of a host, rather than that of an actor and stage manager. The caprice which prompts this remarkable man to surround his play house with a romance surpasses my understanding. Yet, that is one of the sinews of his power not only in England, but in the United States. He thinks we Americans are parsimonious only in relation to amusements. The other night he said to me:

"An American will spend $20 for a dinner, but debates about $1.50 for the playhouse. I am delighted with my experiences in the New World. While your people do not have the same ideas of seat values in the theatres that we have here, they were perfectly willing to pay me the same price as I receive in England. I could not have played for less. It cost me from shore to shore $1,710 every night I raised the curtain. I paid my company 50 per cent more salary than they receive in England, because the difference in living between here and the United States is so great. I think Americans are liberal in the extreme with everything but the theatre. There they are economical, and the result is that they cannot get the productions that we can get in a country where living is cheap and perfection can be obtained by discipline and thorough education."

THE LYCEUM THEATRE

is a curious old building. How long it was erected before Henry Irving and Ellen Terry occupied it, I do not know. But those two remarkable personages have given it an individuality and strength that it has never before known. It has strange surroundings. The entrance is on Wellington street and the door leading to the pit is on the Strand. A big gin mill occupies the ground between this common entrance to a great play house and the place where the nightoned people enter. There are big, brown Corinthian pillars in front, which remind me of those before the residence of Andrew Jackson at the "Hermitage" in Tennessee, sixteen miles from Nashville. To the right as you go to the main entrance there is the gamblers' club, just by the turn on Wellington street, after you have crossed Waterloo bridge and the great thoroughfare leading to the Bank of England. This is one of the curiosities of London, where millions of money are every night laid on the races or at cards. Yet, the theatre with its master dominates the whole of this section of the British metropolis and it is a bright spot in a rather sombre quarter.

One night after I had looked upon

THE SPLENDID PRODUCTION OF "RAVENSWOOD,"

I joined Mr. Irving in his dining room behind and above the stage. Frequently, very frequently, he has these symposiums, to which a dozen or more people sit down. It is close to 12 o'clock before the first course is served, and there is no telling when the lights will be put out. The food is of the best and the liquids of the rarest. But there is no straining after effect, and there is an atmosphere of liberty, and yet, intellectual force about the surroundings that admonishes you all the while that here is the home of hospitality, tempered with a fine responsibility on the part of all those who participate. The atmosphere of the whole place is delightful. There is plenty of good talk tending to improve the vision and touch the realty of life. The dinner is simply a vehicle to the greater purpose that lingers from 12 o'clock at night until any reasonable hour in the morning. The surroundings are such that no one dreams of license, and if the day dawns before the intellectual game is over, every one goes home feeling the better for having enjoyed Mr. Irving's hospitality.

Not long ago there was a notable gathering around this table from which so much has been taken and over which so much has been said. The affair was so unique that it impressed itself upon my memory of like events elsewhere. Mr. Irving sat in the center of the table, and Ellen Terry directly opposite him. Mr. Loveday was at the head of the table. He is Mr. Irving's stage manager and supervises all his productions. At the other end was Bram Stoker, Mr. Irving's chief lieutenant in management. To his right sat Ellen Terry's son, a handsome boy of twenty, who wears spectacles and has hair which looks like his mother's. He plays the part of a younger brother to his mother in "Ravenswood," and plays it well. In fact, there is something so sympathetic in the

CONDUCT OF MOTHER AND SON

on the stage that it seems to you like real, and when you meet him at the supper table the illusion only grows stronger. Mrs. Ward, the mother of the sculptor, sat next to Henry Irving, and three or four members of his company were sanwiched around among different people, while John M. Francis, who owns the Troy *Times* and used to be our minister to Austria, wore a black scull-cap, looked wise and talked with all that diplomacy for which he is noted.

Mr. Irving's association with the members of his own company struck be something unusual when you come to consider the relations between master and man. These around the table was well as those who were with him behind the scenes seem to be in perfect harmony with his methods, although they made it apparent by their acts and utterances that they had great respect for him. Col. Tom Ochiltree came into the symosium of intellect and fodder to find some similar recollections of old-time days and to marvel at a theatrical manager who every week entertains more Americans than any other man in London. In fact, I have often thought that Mr. Irving had rented this Beefsteak club and fitted up that large dining room just to keep himself in good temper with the people of the new world whom he thinks well off, and is more than willing to entertain.

One of the pleasures of the evening was meeting Charles Wyndham, whom I knew in the Union army during the rebellion. He and Irving are great friends and the limit of their hospitality has not yet been touched.

THERE IS AN AIR OF MYSTERY

surrounding Mr. Irving's theatre. Perhaps it would be better to say an air of dignity. He has any number of secretaries and servants. When you call in the morning a man with one arm, dressed im a military uniform, meets you at the threshold. It is difficult to see the master of the house unless you have an engagement. Then it is easy. The morning usher is an old soldier who wears an armless sleeve, and the authorities call him a commissionaire. There are 1,500 of those veterans in London, who are undertaking to make a living as errand runners, porters or attendants upon shops. The average Englishman has no use for the messenger boy of which we people in the United States know. For a year they have been trying to establish the new system patterned after that in the United States, but the people won't have it, and the telegraph, which is prompt and cheap, combined with the commissionaire fills the bill to the English mind.

My impression is that the polite man in front of the Lyceum left his arm in Burmah, in a sort of many encounter with its lusky citizens. Being educated as a soldier, he is politeness itself, and yet preserves that decorum befitting a warrior. He stands before a great pair of brown curtains which hang in front of the entrance to this historic play house and the outlook is not inviting. In fact, all

THE THEATRES IN LONDON LACK COLOR AND SPIRIT

either by day or night. They are dreary places to look at, and difficult to get into, for you either have to go underground or up stairs to see a play. As a rule they are not attractive until you get into them, but there is an air of comfort about all the surroundings that makes you contented when you get there. The barroom privileges are abundant and you can have a drink brought to your seat or an ice for your girl without going out. In fact, they do not permit you to leave a play house in London without charging for return. They provide everything on the inside and expect you to patronize them. Yet, no one abuses these privileges and neither men nor women get funny because they are allowed to have what they want without leaving the theatre. These English women and men are very much in love with their stomachs, and food and liquor play a very eminent part in the economy of this nation.

As I said before the theatres are mostly underground; some of them entirely so, and they bear no comparison whatever to the American playhouses for beauty, but in comfort they can give us points. The seats are roomy, the isles wide and the attendance as perfect as it can be. That is probably because pretty girls are the ushers instead of boys. The long passages and singular byways by which you get in and out set the average American wild with apprehension, lest he be burned up or murdered in case of a panic. The new theatres now being constructed change this condition of affairs, and give you more of an American playhouse than they have ever known in the British capital. No matter how big the kick among actors and actresses about American theatres the London houses are no comparison to them so far as comfort for the players is concerned. The audience, however, fares better and the people who pay the cheap prices are just as well off as those who buy the most expensive seats known as the stalls.

The Bookmakers' club within marble toss of Henry Irving's business home does not contaminate it in the least.

THE LYCEUM THEATRE IS THE SHRINE

toward which all the best of London turn. Mr. Irving and Miss Terry impart a wonderful charm to this strange old playhouse where there are curious passages and many entrances. It is regarded as the home of the drama, and Mr. Irving's intellectuality gives it a standing that is superior to all else. His productions are the perfection of stage management, and he prides himself upon pictures as much as upon acting. His idea is that in this age of wonderful resource there should be as much perfection in detail as power in utterance. Reading lines well does not play the entire part in his idea of a production. Perfection in scenery, color and costume lend its assistance to the actors who play their parts well in all they have to do.

The Beefsteak club was once a great institution in the social life of the British capital. It was once the resort of high-bred Bohemians like Mr. Irving, and by some strange chance it was located just back of his theatre. When it fell into decline or removed its headquarters, Mr. Irving rented the old building, and had a skairway constructed from behind his stage leading up to the rooms made famous by the rivals of all the old artists, actors and writers of London. Its power and glory had departed and the few who remember it and have respect for its traditions have drifted into the Garrick club, a pleasant place of abode for those who want to enjoy the hospitality of life in a pleasant way. Perhaps as much as anything else this departure from the Beefsteak to the Garrick illustrates the changes in the life of this metropolis of the world. The quaint old places like

THE BEEFSTEAK CLUB

have given way to the more swagger establishment like the Garrick, because London has changed from its old-time habits to a new and broader one, where men are rather more careful of their habits, if not happier than when Charles Dickens wrote of the times and places gone forever.

No theatrical manager of the world has so many and such broad social qualities as Mr. Irving. In and around this old home of the Beefsteak club he has established a new order of things. The dining room is just the same as in the old historic days, but there are new pictures, new surrounding and a new and broad-minded master. There is a portrait of Napoleon on the wall, but a very few reminders of the great shop below, where money is earned to keep up the expensive entertainments which take place in this strange attachment to a great playhouse after the night's work is over. No theatrical manager in the United States has even a glimpse of such a life as Mr. Irving leads in this strange old apartment behind his stage where the pick of broad men and women are often called to enjoy his hospitality. Yet, it is a strange thing that he keeps within his own realm. He is not much given to seeking beyond his own set and those whom he invites to his table after the theatre are of that class of men and women who contribute more or less to the intellectual end of life.

Mr. Irving must be as old a man as Edwin Booth, and yet with all his love of his fellows and of their association, he is a much younger one. Possibly this is because of his constant touch with humanity. Mr. Booth, by force of circumstances, is more or less of a recluse. He is obliged to live apart from men or their delights. His knowledge of human nature is limited, while that of Henry Irving is very broad. While Edwin Booth is anxious to benefit his profession, he does not know how, as the Players' club in New York illustrates. But Mr. Irving is so careful to keep within elbow reach of the warmest elements of life, whether they be grave or gay, that he knows just where to help the people whom he admires. Perhaps no broader example could be presented than in members of his own company, who have been with him for years and will probably remain with him as long as he continues to be a factor in theatrical life. Many of them are old, very old, but they still act their parts, and he treats them with a consideration that is remarkable. I have never thought Mr. Irving the greatest actor in the world, but there is a completeness about his conduct and power that is something far beyond the average.

WYNDHAM HAS A SINGULAR THEATRE

up on Piccadilly, which is entirely under ground. The roof of his playhouse is a restaurant, and swell place where good food and good drink can be found. The night after Mr. Irving's dinner Mr. Wyndham was entertaining the company of Piccadilly circus, just beyond his theatre, where you have to go down three flights of stairs to find your seat. Going in from the street you are confronted with a sign board pointing towards the theatre, reading:

"This way to the Theatre."

The mention of the names of those attending Mr. Irving's feast will be proof enough of good company, and I am a living witness as to the quality of the viands and the pleasures of the evening. There is a wide difference between the two actors with whom I have dined. Mr. Irving represents a domain of serious effort, while Mr. Wyndham is the cavalryman of the stage.

Many people think that Mr. Irving should be characterized as the picturesque actor of the English boards, but I prefer to look at the serious side of his endeavors and leave his mannerisms to those who object to a person being different from all the rest of mankind.

"I have no habits," said Mr. Irving one day to a man who asked him what were his hours. "I live in the theatre," he continued, "and every day at 13 o'clock you can find me unless I have some very special engagement. I have plenty to do to look after the details of my business, on and off the stage, for I not only act, but pay close attention to management."

Just at this moment Mr. Loveday, the stage manager, came in, and the actor turned to give him directions for the day. There

SEEMS TO BE PERFECT HARMONY

about all the arrangements. Every hour seemed to have its evactions, and the heads of departments appeared at a fixed moment, transacted their business and retired. No surplus words are wasted, and in a short time Mr. Irving turned to his mail, which is something enormous. Letters of inquiry upon all sorts of subjects are awaiting his directions, and he had to answer all kinds of questions asked by stage-struck girls, by a preacher or a statesman. As men and women in England rarely send letters except those written with their own hand, Mr. Irving is obliged to pen a large number, and a great deal of his time is taken up with correspondence.

After supper in the Beefsteak club I suggested the possibility of his coming to America next fall.

"No," he replied, "I am going into the provinces and Mr. Daly is coming to my theatre. I do not intend to leave England again soon, unless some new conditions arise of which I am not now advised.

FRANK A. BURR.